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ABSTRACT

The claim that using the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) English General Examinations in lieu of regular English composition courses contributes to lowering of the quality of higher education was investigated by determining whether the level of achievement in the CLEP English Examination was related either to the frequency in which advanced English and history courses were taken or the success achieved in these courses. The study population consisted of a random sample of 13 students at the junior and senior levels attending the University of Central Florida. Data on the student's permanent record card were stratified by selected achievement decile intervals on the CLEP English Examination, and a non-CLEP English group was included. The analysis contrasted the sub-groups on various achievement factors and on enrollment and achievement in the advanced courses. The findings indicate that students who score in the 50 to 59th percentile range had a lower level of achievement in both the advanced English and history courses. The data may enable academic personnel to determine the appropriateness of using the CLEP English Examination as a means of waiving the English composition requirement for freshman students. A review of studies attempting to investigate the validity of the CLEP examinations for awarding college credit and for exempting students from completing basic general education courses is included. (SW)

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CLEP ENGLISH FOLLOW-UP STUDY

Presented at

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigated the claim that using CLEP English General Examinations in lieu of regular English composition courses contributes to lowering of the quality of higher education. This was accomplished by determining if the level of achievement on the CLEP English Examination was related either to the frequency in which advanced English and history courses were taken or the success achieved in these courses. The findings indicate that students who score in the 50-59th percentile range had a lower level of achievement in both the advanced English and history courses. The findings provide data which will enable academic personnel to determine the appropriateness of using the CLEP English Examination as a means of waiving the English composition requirement for freshman students.

CLEP ENGLISH FOLLOW-UP STUDY

INTRODUCTION

The quality of learning at both the secondary and post-secondary levels of education has drawn considerable attention during the last two years. The public has accused the educational community of certifying degrees for students who do not have the necessary basic skills to function effectively in our society. Others, including college professors, contend that many college students and some college graduates cannot write effectively. Since many students are allowed to waive all of the English composition requirements by passing the CLEP general examination, concern has been expressed by many that using the CLEP English general examination in lieu of the regular English composition courses contributes to this problem.

In an attempt to provide additional information on the impact of CLEP, a study was designed to determine if the level of achievement on the CLEP English general examination was related to the frequency with which more advanced English courses were taken and to the success of students in advanced English courses. In addition, the study attempted to determine if CLEP English achievement was related to the frequency with which history courses were taken and to the

success of students in history courses.

The specific purposes of this follow-up study were:

1. to determine if the level of CLEP English achievement, as measured by the CLEP English General examination score, affected the frequency that a more advanced English course was completed.
2. to determine if the level of CLEP English achievement, as measured by the CLEP English General examination score, affected student achievement in more advanced English courses.
3. to determine if the level of CLEP English achievement, as measured by the CLEP English General examination score, affected the frequency that a history course was completed.
4. to determine if the level of CLEP English achievement, as measured by the CLEP English General examination score, affected student achievement in history courses.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The College Level Examination Program was established by the College Board in 1965. It was developed with a broad purpose of establishing a national system of awarding credit by examination in selected subject areas. The program has two basic types of examinations. The five general examinations were designed to provide a comprehensive measure of

the liberal arts area and the subject examinations were designed to assess achievement in specific courses. Although the program was designed for non-traditional students, the program has been expanded in many different directions and is being utilized in a variety of ways. This program currently enables unaffiliated students to validate knowledge obtained through non-traditional means and receive college credit. It provides measures of college equivalency for use by business, industry, and other non-academic organizations. It enables professionals to meet licensing and certification requirements and serves as a means of qualifying for job advancement. It provides colleges with an advanced placement vehicle that can be utilized to award credit for both traditional and non-traditional students.

Numerous studies were completed in the last decade which attempted to investigate the validity of the CLEP examinations for awarding college credit and exempting students from completing the basic general education courses. A study by Losak and Lin (November 1973) compared a matched group of students who had completed the CLEP examination between 1970 and 1971 and revealed that CLEP student performance in all five academic areas of the general examination was very similar to that of the non-CLEP group. Their findings supported the thesis that many students possess the skills and knowledge taught in the general education courses. Losak and Lin concluded that from a theoretical point of

view the CLEP program is valuable and is a valid method for awarding credit by examination in the community college.

In a validity study completed at the University of Iowa, Enger and Whitney (1974) reported that students who received CLEP credit accumulated more credit hours, had higher GPAs, and graduated earlier. However, when differences associated with high school rank and ACT score were considered, very little difference remained between the CLEP and the non-CLEP students. They concluded that although number of credit hours, higher GPA, and earlier graduation appear to be functions of CLEP credit, these factors were predictable from differences in measures of academic ability and achievement at the time of admission. Enger and Whitney concluded that the CLEP examination program fulfilled the purpose of allowing well-prepared students at the University of Iowa to satisfy basic requirements and to take additional courses for which they were prepared.

A study completed by Coleman (1975) compared the effect of completing basic courses and more advanced courses prior to completing the CLEP examination. His findings revealed that only 25 percent of the students who completed a basic English course scored at the 50th percentile on the general CLEP English Composition examination compared to 27 percent of those students who did not take the course and 70 percent of those students who had completed an advanced writing course. In addition, Coleman reported there was a high

correlation between the Florida Twelfth Grade Test Score and success on the CLEP English examination and that students who use the CLEP English examination as a prerequisite were quite successful in subsequent courses.

Losak (1976) reported on a study conducted by the State of Florida CLEP Task Force. The task force completed a study on two indpendent groups of students. One group consisted of a sub-group of students who received credit and a similar sub-group that did not attempt the CLEP examination program. The second group compared a sub-group of students who received credit for CLEP and a comparable sub-group who participated in the CLEP program, scored at the same level, and were not awarded credit. Losak's findings revealed that in group one, 71 percent of those students that received credit versus 44 percent of those students who did not attempt the CLEP program had either completed their community college degrees or were currently enrolled. In addition, the study provided evidence which indicated that the grade point average for the CLEP sub-group was significantly higher than the grade point average of the non-CLEP sub-group. The analysis of the second group revealed that 63 percent of the CLEP sub-group who received credit and 61 percent of the sub-group who did not receive credit had either graduated or were currently enrolled. The sub-group which was eligible but did not receive credit had a grade point average that was significantly higher than their CLEP

peers. Losak's findings provided evidence that the graduation rate for the CLEP sub-groups was higher in both cases.

A study at the University of Utah reported on faculty attitude and student success on the CLEP examination program (McKean, Gordon, Checketts, Pappas, Peterson, and Welcker, 1973). McKean reported that faculty reaction was immediate and sometimes vociferous when students started taking the examination and receiving credit. The results of this study revealed that students who received CLEP credit carried heavier loads, completed nearly as many freshman level courses during the first two quarters, and performed as well as the regular sophomores. However, approximately 60 percent of the students in the study were not required to take any form of freshman English. (Checketts, 1973)

Regardless of the success students achieve in their college course work, a general concern has been expressed by academia about the relevancy of the CLEP general English examination for awarding college credit. In the Utah study, Checketts (1973) reported that a great concern was expressed by the English Department because the examination was an objective examination rather than an essay examination. The Utah study population was divided into five basic sub-groups consisting of students who received advanced placement credit, CLEP credit, A or B in freshman English, CLEP waiver, and C or D in freshman English. Those students who met the English requirement by means of advanced placement had

superior performance to any of the other sub-groups. Checketts and Christensen's (1974) overall findings indicate there was no disadvantage in using the objective test to determine writing ability. Other works by Checketts and Christensen provided evidence that if one assumes the freshman English grade point average to be a valid predictor of writing skills, an objective test could be a better predictor of writing skills than the essay test. Christensen indicated that none of the sub-groups in the study scored very high on the essay test. However, since there is no universally accepted procedure for assessing writing skills, it may have been a result of the test rather than the student's writing ability (Christensen, 1977).

Numerous authors and groups have expressed philosophical opposition to the CLEP English examination. Apstein (1975) indicated that although review books and cram courses can prepare one to pass an objective question examination, the high examination score does not show that a student has received the full intellectual benefit of the traditional learning experience. Further, many writing problems need additional discussion and cannot be fully understood and comprehended by the mere assimilation of text materials. Apstein indicated (1975) that the primary purpose of an English course is to develop a skill and that the current CLEP examination is designed to assess a student's capacity

to recall a body of information. However, Apstein (1975) believes that the use of these examinations forced English departments to devise exemption examinations and in so doing they determined what skills are to be measured. In a study completed by Tittle, Weiner and Phelps (1975) which compared the CLEP English Composition scores with the university English placement procedure, it was revealed that a low correlation (.24) existed between the two measures. These findings support the thesis of others that the CLEP English examination does not closely parallel the objectives of the composition courses.

Only a limited amount of research has been reported which addresses the issue of course selection in specific areas after CLEP credit has been awarded. Gordon (1973) reported that students who received CLEP credit completed numerous freshman courses, but they did not take freshman English. He also found that students who did not earn CLEP credit performed less well during their first term, but they performed at the same level during the second, third, and fourth terms.

The research findings seem to indicate that students who participate in the CLEP examination program are highly motivated and perform well in their educational program. However, the concern which addresses what impact participation in the CLEP English program has on the intellectual development of the high ability student remains unanswered.

Educators wish to know if participation prevents the outstanding students from achieving full potential in their selected field.

This study attempts to address this important issue by relating achievement on the CLEP English general examination to enrollment and achievement in more advanced English and history courses at the University of Central Florida.

THE STUDY

Methodology

The population of this study consisted of a random sample of students at the junior and senior levels attending the University of Central Florida. Data were obtained from the student's permanent record card and stratified by selected achievement decile intervals on the CLEP English examination. In addition to the CLEP sub-groups, a non-CLEP English group was included. The non-CLEP English group consisted of students who received credit via CLEP in at least one area, but who did not receive any CLEP credit in English. The analysis contrasted the sub-groups in terms of overall hours earned, overall grade point average, Florida Twelfth Grade (FTG) English achievement scores and Florida Twelfth Grade total scores. In addition, analyses of the frequency that more advanced English and history courses were completed and the achievement in these courses were completed to determine if the level of CLEP English achievement was related to the achievement level in other areas of

academic pursuit.

Data Analysis

The comparison of the various sub-groups revealed only minor differences among the FTG English and the FTG total achievement scores for the various CLEP sub-groups. Table I provides a summary of the number of students in each sub-group who had FTG scores as well as the mean and standard deviation for each group by test category. There were minor differences among the group averages and the differences were not consistently related to CLEP achievement level. The 80th percentile sub-group had both the highest FTG English achievement score and the highest FTG total score. The increase in FTG English achievement scores was directly related to decile groups. The ANOVA design revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean English achievement scores at the .05 level of significance. The post-test analysis using the Newman-Keuls test revealed statistically significant differences between Group 5 (non-CLEP English group) and the other four groups and a difference between Group 1 and Group 4. In the FTG total category, the average score for the non-CLEP English group was nearly 15 points below any other group. The ANOVA design revealed a statistically significant difference between the mean FTG total scores at the .05 level of significance. The post-test analysis using the Newman-Keuls test revealed a statistically significant difference between

TABLE I

SUMMARY OF NUMBER OF STUDENTS, FTG ENGLISH SCORES
FTG TOTAL SCORES, AND VARIANCE
BY SUBGROUP

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
Number	21	31	25	26	28
FTG English Achievement Mean	89.9	91.0	91.2	96.1	81.4
Standard Deviation	5.8	8.0	8.1	3.9	12.2
FTG Total Mean	446.9	443.1	449.2	461.3	428.3
Standard Deviation	29.4	38.0	26.6	27.9	40.4

Group Definitions:

Group 1 - 50-59 percentile
Group 2 - 60-69 percentile
Group 3 - 70-79 percentile
Group 4 - 80 percentile or above
Group 5 - Non-CLEP English Group (students who received CLEP credit in at least one area, but who did not receive credit in CLEP English)

Group 5 and Group 4.

The data in Table I revealed that students who scored at the 80th percentile had higher test scores and tended to be more homogeneously grouped. In addition, students who attempted the CLEP English examination and did not receive credit, as a whole, had lower test scores and were more heterogeneously grouped than the other groups.

Table II provides a summary of the number of hours earned and the related grade point averages by group. These data revealed that Group 1 had the greatest average number of hours completed, Group 3 had the highest grade point average and Group 4 was most homogeneous in terms of overall grade point average. An analysis of these data did not reveal a statistically significant difference between either the average number of credit hours completed or average overall GPA at the .05 level of significance.

Based on the information presented in Table I and Table II, there does not appear to be a discernible difference other than the level of performance on the CLEP English examination among the four CLEP sub-groups. However, the differences between the non-CLEP English group and the various CLEP sub-groups would seem to indicate that this group was less capable of doing college work, as measured by the FTG testing program, than their peers who received CLEP credit in the English area.

Table III provides a summary of the number of students who completed a more advanced English course, the average

TABLE II

NUMBER OF STUDENTS, MEAN CREDIT HOURS EARNED AND MEAN GPA BY GROUP

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
Number	25	32	30	29	32
Mean Credit Hours Earned	159.3	145.3	154.0	153.4	153.0
Standard Deviation	37.1	33.9	39.6	39.2	45.8
Grade Point Average Mean GPA	2.988	2.994	3.157	3.059	3.036
Standard Deviation	.385	.494	.503	.109	.465

Group Definitions:

Group 1 - 50-59 percentile
Group 2 - 60-69 percentile
Group 3 - 70-79 percentile
Group 4 - 80 percentile or above
Group 5 - Non-CLEP English Group (students who received CLEP credit in at least one area, but who did not receive credit in CLEP English)

number of English courses completed and the average English grade point average for students completing advanced English courses. In the non-CLEP group, 31 of 32 students (97%) completed a more advanced English course. The 23 students in Group 2 who completed a more advanced English course represented the highest completion percentage (72%) of the CLEP sub-groups. The lowest percentage of students completing an advanced English course was observed for Group 3. The Chi-square analysis did not reveal that completing a more advanced English course was dependent on group at the .05 level of significance. The average GPA earned in the advanced English courses varied from a high of 3.5 for Group 4 to a low of 3.03 for Group 1. The ANOVA design did not reveal a statistically significant difference between the mean achievement level in advanced English courses at the .05 level of significance.

Table IV provides a summary of the number of students who completed a history course and the corresponding average grades earned after having waived the basic English requirement. These data revealed that the non-CLEP English group completed a higher percentage of history courses than any other group. A Chi-square analysis did not reveal that completing a history course was dependent on group at the .05 level of significance. The average history grade data revealed that Group 2 obtained the highest average (2.89) and Group 1 the lowest average (2.36). The ANOVA design did

TABLE III

NUMBER OF STUDENTS COMPLETING ADVANCED ENGLISH COURSES, AVERAGE NUMBER OF COURSES AND CORRESPONDING AVERAGE GRADE EARNED

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
Number in Group	24	32	30	29	32
Number Completing English Course	17	23	16	18	31
Mean Number of Courses Complete	1.1	1.1	.7	.8	1.42
Average Grade	3.03	3.20	3.44	3.50	3.06
Standard Deviation	.94	.79	.68	.62	.58

Group Definitions:

Group 1 - 50-50 percentile
Group 2 - 60-69 percentile
Group 3 - 70-79 percentile
Group 4 - 80 percentile or above
Group 5 - Non-CLEP English Group (students who received CLEP credit in at least one area, but who did not receive credit in CLEP English)

TABLE IV

NUMBER OF STUDENTS COMPLETING A HISTORY COURSE, AVERAGE NUMBER OF COURSES COMPLETED AND CORRESPONDING AVERAGE GRADE EARNED BY GROUP

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
Number	24	32	30	29	31
Number Completing History Course	11	15	16	11	18
Mean Number of Courses Completed	.91	.75	.77	.62	1.06
Average Grade Earned	2.36	2.89	2.48	2.73	2.83
Standard Deviation	.58	1.09	.80	.82	.60

Group Definitions:

Group 1 - 50-59 percentile
Group 2 - 60-69 percentile
Group 3 - 70-79 percentile
Group 4 - 80 percentile or above
Group 5 - Non-CLEP English Group (students who received CLEP credit in at least one area, but who did not receive credit in CLEP English)

not reveal a statistically significant difference between the mean grade point averages earned in history courses at the .05 level of significance. The information in Table IV would indicate that achievement level on the CLEP English general examination is not directly related to either the number of history courses taken or achievement in history courses. However, it is important to note that even though the control group did not appear to be as well prepared, their performance was second only to Group 2.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study substantiated previous findings that performance on the CLEP examination was highly correlated with performance on admission test scores. The achievement on the Florida Twelfth Grade English Test was directly related to the decile ranking of the CLEP sub-groups. The non-CLEP English group had the lowest Florida Twelfth Grade English Achievement score and was more heterogeneously grouped than the CLEP sub-groups. A statistically significant difference was observed between the mean Florida Twelfth Grade English Achievement scores for the non-CLEP group and the CLEP sub-groups. A significant difference in the mean Florida Twelfth Grade English Achievement score was observed between Group 4 and Group 1. In general these data revealed that students who scored at the 80th percentile or higher had the highest test scores and tended to be more homogeneously grouped.

Further, the non-CLEP English group appeared to be less capable of doing college work.

The analysis of the number of hours completed and the overall grade point average did not reveal any discernible differences among the five sub-populations. A comparison of the frequency with which advanced English courses were taken revealed that nearly all (97%) of the non-CLEP English group completed a more advanced English course. Of the CLEP sub-groups, the highest rate of completion of an advanced English course was 72 percent. A statistical analysis did not reveal that completion rate was dependent on population. Further, no significant differences were observed between the mean performance in advanced English courses for the five sub-populations. The comparison of the frequency with which history courses were completed revealed that the non-CLEP English group had the highest completion rate. However, the statistical analysis did not reveal that enrollment in a history course was dependent on population. Further, there were no discernible differences in the mean performance in history courses between the groups.

This study did not provide evidence which would indicate that any one percentile score is an ideal cut threshold. However, students who score in the 50-59th percentile range on the CLEP English General Examination tended to demonstrate lower levels of achievement in both

advanced English courses and history courses. Further, the non-CLEP English group, whose level of preparation appeared somewhat lower than the CLEP sub-groups, completed advanced English courses and history courses at a higher rate and performed as well as their CLEP peers.

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